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STARVATION OF ELK TO BE STOPPED

Sportsmen, Officials, and Local Residents  
Agree on Plan for Refuge for 20,000

The problem of preventing the starvation of the southern Yellowstone elk herd in bad winters in the region of Jackson Hole, Wyoming, was discussed at a four-day conference just closed in Washington and out of it has come the first complete plan of administration that considers all the conditions confronting the largest single herd of these magnificent big-game animals. The commission considering the problem was called together by the Secretary of War, chairman of the President's National Conference on Outdoor Recreation. Those in attendance were a unit in believing that the appalling tragedy resulting from the starvation of great numbers of elk in severe winters must stop, and the work of the commission was directed specifically to that end.

With the benefit of first-hand and up-to-date testimony as to conditions surrounding the elk herd, made possible by the presence of representatives of all Federal and State governmental agencies interested and of sportsmen's associations and residents of the immediate region, the commission adopted a comprehensive set of recommendations. These were prefaced by a statement that recognized the Jackson Hole elk herd as a natural resource, combining economic, esthetic, and recreational values, in which the State and Federal Governments, private citizens, and civic and sportsmen's organizations are actively and intensely interested.

The history of this herd reveals that hard winters following a period of easy years not only operate to wipe out any surplus but threaten extermination. Losses through starvation present a condition not in harmony with advanced thought in game administration and are wholly indefensible, inhumane, and inconsistent with a national program of conservation.

The commission determined that the optimum number of elk to be maintained should not exceed 20,000, and all members were agreed that the present winter feed for the elk is insufficient during hard winters for the herd that it is desirable to maintain. It was recommended that the Federal Government acquire certain ranches and other private lands, which, if added to the areas of the existing Federal game refuge and the adjacent property of the Izaak Walton League, would provide feed to carry the elk through the bad winters.

An immediate count of the elk in the southern Yellowstone herd was recommended, the plans to be developed by the supervisor of the Teton National Forest, the game warden of the Biological Survey at Jackson Hole, and a representative of the Wyoming State Game and Fish Commission, with arrangements for observation of the count by representatives of actively interested organizations. The count will start within the next two weeks. Proposal was also made that the Biological Survey conduct as soon as possible a comprehensive investigation of the life history of the elk and of conditions bearing upon their maintenance in suitable numbers. It was also recommended that an advisory board, made up of representatives of the State Game Commission, the Forest Service, the Biological Survey, and local stockmen's and the Dude Ranchers' associations meet each year at Jackson to review existing conditions and to recommend such steps as should be taken to promote the general program for the welfare of the elk.

It was urged that the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission be given wide latitude in handling such problems as length of hunting seasons, bag limits, and the establishment of hunting areas, and also authority to remove by official killing and disposal for economic use any surplus that might remain after hunting.

A complete program for the handling of this herd of elk will be announced in a report to be published within the next few months.

The individuals and organizations represented at the Washington meeting were the Boone and Crockett Club, by Charles Sheldon, who served as chairman of the Commission; Governor Emerson of Wyoming, by W. C. Deloney; ranchers of Jackson Hole, by Robert E. Miller; Dude Ranchers' Association, by Irving H. Laron; U. S. Biological Survey, by E. A. Goldman; U. S. Forest Service, by Will C. Barnes; National Park Service, by Horace M. Albright; U. S. General Land Office, by F. S. Herbert; Izaak Walton League of America, by Seth E. Gordon; Camp Fire Club of America; by O. H. Van Norden; American Game Protective Association, by John B. Burnham; American Society of Mammalogists, by Dr. T. S. Palmer; and the National Conference on Outdoor Recreation, by its secretary, Arthur Ringland.

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